1971

"Not All Wine and Roses"

Mildred Emory Persinger

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by MILDRED EMORY PERSINGER

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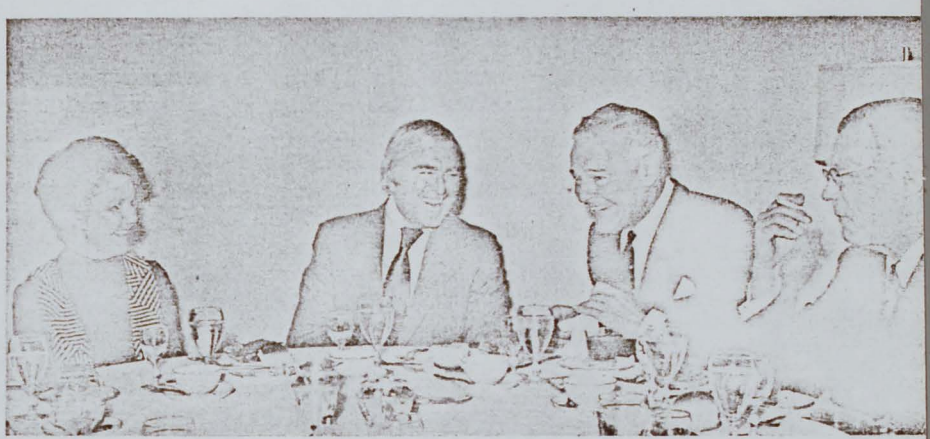
IT WAS FUN, going to receptions full of celebrities and being asked if I was Shirley Temple Black. But it wasn't all White House wine and roses, press interviews and televised public hearings. In fact, there was only a little hoopla and lots of hard work during the almost 10 months' life of the President's Commission for the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations.

President Nixon appointed the Commission with former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge as its chairman on July 9, 1970 in response to an appeal from the UN for a "substantive observance" of the 25th Anniversary rather than a purely ceremonial one. He charged the Commission with preparing "for the President recommendations to assist him in his determination of United States policy toward the United Nations."

At a White House dinner in honor of UN Secretary General U Thant to which members of the Commission were invited we began to perceive the outlines of conflicting world views which would mark our struggles over what we would ultimately propose to the President. By White House standards it was an intimate little party. The approximately 85 guests who gathered in the East Room made that scene of so many elegant crushes seem cavernous. The dinner jackets of the predominantly male members of the Commission, U.S. Ambassadors to the UN and other mature members of the Establishment created a dark mass effect against which the gowns of a lovely-looking First Lady and a handful of other women representatives to UN bodies and U.S. organization presidents were bright against the black.



Our author with Congressman Cornelius Gallagher of New Jersey, Commission Chairman Henry Cabot Lodge and James C. Hagerty at lunch after presenting the Report to President Nixon.

It was a perfect meal in the State Dining Room, enhanced by what I took to be Mary Lincoln's gold service and prepared by a noted French chef now serving his second U.S. President. After entertainment by the strolling Marine minstrels who had strolled in formation through the open end of the white horseshoe table, the business of the evening began. Senator Mike Mansfield, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Charles Yost and UN Under-Secretary Ralph Bunche (in one of his last public appearances) paid graceful tribute to the Secretary General. Shirley Temple Black then exceeded U.S. policy of neutrality on the subject of the SG and praised him with characteristic warmth.

Our genial and cordial host, the President of the United States, his office the symbol of power in the world, spoke of the proclivity of men for war and the impossibility of changing that. But he felt we must support the United Nations which could ameliorate the conflicts. In response, the Secretary General of the United Nations, symbol of powerlessness, spoke of religious faith and said change must come in men's hearts before they can live in peace. This kindly and spiritual man, who has striven with vision and doggedness in the face of continuing discouragement to keep his organization alive and solvent, inadvertently revealed his preoccupation with his burden. He reminded his listeners of what a tiny share of the American tax dollar it takes to support UN efforts for peace.

There the two men were, behind the golden candelabra and the moun-

tains of roses: the big one, heavily responsible for the security of a great country that could be at the crossroads of its power and influence in the world; the small one, armed only with moral suasion, representing the majority of men, most of them dark skinned, who have little power to participate in the decisions that guide their destiny. They seemed to pose the question for the Commission and for all Americans: where do the interests of the United States lie—in the assumption of international anarchy or in the recognition that this tiny planet is not just one eco-system but one social system where survival means change?

The Commission was to study the UN and make policy recommendations. At least one member was dismayed that he was expected to do any real work. The 45 of us had been duly sworn in and presented with large scrolls embossed with the seal of the United States, their fat mailing tubes addressed to "The Honorable . . ." We had begun to set up a working group and a schedule for producing a report.

Senator J. William Fulbright, with the querulousness of his style as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, began to complain that he had understood the Commission was strictly honorary. Boldly I suggested that he should welcome the opportunity to work for a more effective United Nations, one means of achieving his objective of limiting the power of the Executive branch in international affairs.

He came over afterwards to shake hands and say how interested he was in those comments. At the St. Louis hearings of the Commission where he was chairman, he repeatedly stressed one of his favorite themes, the necessity for a multilateral approach to issues of war and peace. Later he made a major speech urging more authority for the UN.

Most of the time the Commission had to get along without any of its four Senators and four members of the House, though they were consulted informally. In fact, it was soon apparent that there would be a certain core of Commissioners who would take the work seriously. This group was strengthened by the addition of five very able "youth" members. At the White House dinner the one young man present had protested to the President that young people have a stake in the UN of the future and should be represented on a commission charged with making proposals for it.

As a group, the five older women and two young women members could always be counted on to turn in their papers, to attend extra meetings, to have done their homework and to show up at hearings. In fact, there was an amusing situation before one public hearing began. It was equal to the consternation of the sisters at a Catholic college, host to one hearing, when they observed from the audience the effect of miniskirts behind the footlights under the hearing panel's table.

In Rochester it appeared that because of the faithful attendance of women members there would be more women on the platform than men. Such embarrassment! Such scurrying around to swell the ranks with whatever available men could by any stretch be legitimatized to hear the witnesses! Finally the director of the Commission and a former Ambassador to the UN were seated on the platform for balance so that the distinguished witnesses would not be downgraded by having to speak to a predominantly female panel.

At our first meeting when I suggested that the Commission's hearings should be held at the grass roots rather than in Washington, that seemed impossible on the very conservative budget allotted to us. And it might have been impossible without the determination, persuasiveness and organizing ability of John Isaacson who was also president of the St. Louis United Nations Association. He and I were appointed the Hearings Committee, but I could just barely hang on as he whirled through the political thicket to get clearance—through the bureaucratic thicket to get financial support—and through the organizational thicket to get cooperation.

In the end, it was the magnificent local citizens, particularly those in the United Nations Associations, who made it possible for the Commission hearings panels to receive overflow crowds in six cities across the country, to hear the full range of local opinion and to stay out of the red. The Commission remained in the black, that is, but some of the local citizens must have had to run a deficit, so all out were their efforts.

Even more all out were the statements offered in the six areas where hearings were held: Atlanta, St. Louis, Des Moines, Rochester, N.Y., Portland, Oregon and San Francisco. One of the governing principles was insistence on hearing the full range of local opinion. At one session there was no protest of U.S. involvement in international organizations for so long that I persuaded the chairman to move the D.A.R. representative up on the list. I regretted my poor judgment when she prepared to stay for the afternoon session and could have spoken while Mr. Farm Bureau who had come to advocate international cooperation stalked out for another appointment, taking his statement with him.

They revealed the two strains with which the Commission was contending in more moderate form in its private deliberations. There was the fortress approach where national power is paramount. In this "state of nature" international agreements, particularly in the human rights field, are seen as threats to U.S. sovereignty. That word sovereignty, by the way, called up such excesses of emotion, both in those who clung to the concept with religious fervor and those who were willing to invest a little of it in collective security, that it began to take on some of the attributes of a myth.

In the Atlanta hearing I saw mild-mannered Senator John Sherman Cooper aflame with righteous indignation when a witness accused the Senate in acceding to the Charter of the United Nations, of endangering the sovereignty of the United States. But by far the great majority of the more than 200 individuals and representatives of organizations spoke out of the conviction that Twentieth Century technology has made the planet into a single community, ready or not, which will have to develop

the institutions for shared decision making on its shared problems if there is to be ever domestic tranquillity of any permanence. Repeatedly they cited the Vietnam war as supporting evidence.

There were sincere, thoughtful, penetrating, eloquent and frequently brilliant presentations from lawyers, legislators, farmers, businessmen, organization leaders, doctors, labor leaders, professors, high school and college students and all manner of ordinary citizens. Some wanted world government; others advised that the U.S. should get out of the UN; some had highly erroneous information; and others had a most sophisticated and technical approach to international organization. One student group had done a survey on attitudes toward the UN and correlated it with the amount of UN information people had. Their finding that favorable attitudes and larger amounts of information were positively related was no surprise to anyone and was demonstrated throughout the Commission hearings.

Of special value were the instances of direct involvement by individuals with some aspect of UN work. Among the most memorable was the statement of a doctor associated with the Public Health Service Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta. He gave a dramatic account of how the network established through the World Health Organization had made possible the development of a serum for Asian flu ready for injection in the United States within 17 days after the disease was first identified as an epidemic on the other side of the world. A Middle West businessman praised the UN's analyses of world economic activity and said he could not run his company without the UN economic reports.

Although many of their recommendations found their way into our report, most witnesses went farther than did the Commission in insisting that it was imperative for the U.S. to support and strengthen the UN by following policies aimed at achieving the goals set forth in the Charter. There was deep anxiety about the uses of power in the world. Roughly a fourth of those who spoke advocated the establishment of a UN standby peacekeeping force. Whereas some recognized the attendant political complications which have paralyzed the Security Council in deciding when and where, if ever, observer teams should be used, others seemed to believe that the very existence of UN military contingents would in themselves deter aggression.

About the same number advocated a broadening of the World Court mandate. Most of these recommended repeal of the Connally reservation governing U.S. participation. Others were concerned that voting power in the General Assembly and what they called real power be more closely related. Some advocated weighted voting.

Thoughout the hearings the greatest interest was shown by the widest range of speakers in the need for more economic aid from developed to developing countries. Many urged that the U.S. devote one percent of its gross national product to assisting developing nations, and most of these felt it should go increasingly through United Nations channels. Some cautioned, however, that anonymity of using multilateral channels might result in a reduction in U.S. total aid, a caution which is proving to have been prophetic.

Another popular subject, and the one which consistently got the headlines, was the UN representation of China. Almost all who dealt with Chinese representation believed that UN membership by the Peoples Republic of China was desirable, primarily on the grounds that the exclusion of so large a percentage of the world's population was unrealistic. Very few, however, were willing to see the Republic of China on Taiwan expelled.

Current interest in the deterioration of the environment stimulated considerable attention to the UN role in preventing international threats to the air, the atmosphere, the oceans and irreplaceable natural resources. There was reference to the UN Conference on the Human Environment to take place next June in Stockholm, and speakers expressed the hope that some international agency could be developed to monitor and prevent such potential damage.

Although there were strong statements on human rights issues and support for a High Commissioner and ratification of Human Rights Covenants and Conventions, witnesses seemed to have less specific information on human rights questions than on others. An exception was the YWCA, whose representatives spoke of the UN's and the YWCA's emphasis on eliminating racism and racial discrimination. They also pointed out the relation of development to the elimination of racial discrimination.

Of the 96 recommendations the Commission finally agreed upon, very few were not touched on in the public hearings. A reading of the Commission report* indicates that those who regard cooperation as an extension rather than a limitation of sovereignty prevailed, just as they did overwhelmingly in the hearings.

The report was presented to President Nixon in the Cabinet room while the Ping Pong players were in China. The China proposal, the most controversial item within the Commission, caused a small flurry in the media. But, after that, what will the report's shelf-life be?

Unless the public demands more effective U.S.-UN participation insistently enough to attract the attention of the White House or the Congress, it is not going to happen despite the earnest efforts now under way within the Bureau of International Organization Affairs in the State Department to improve its own performance. Machinery adequate for U.S.-UN policy development simply is not there and will not be unless one of the Commission's least-likely-to-succeed recommendations is accepted: give the Bureau more authority to do the job.

Meanwhile back at the Bureau they will tell you what they are doing to implement the report. But their efforts will gain strength only from the people's clear vision of their own world.

**Report of the President's Commission for the Observance of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations* (1971: U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20401; 60 cents).